

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 925

IR 055 983

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TITLE World Wide Web Homepages: An Examination of Content and Audience.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 5p.; In: The Internet--Flames, Firewalls and the Future. Proceedings for the 1995 Conference of the Council for Higher Education Computing Services (CHECS) (Roswell, New Mexico, November 8-10, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Analysis; Computer Uses in Education; *Content Analysis; Higher Education; Hypermedia; *Libraries; Library Role; Multimedia Materials; Online Catalogs; School Community Relationship; User Needs (Information); *Users (Information); User Satisfaction (Information); *World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS *Home Pages; New Mexico

ABSTRACT

This paper shows how the content of a World Wide Web page is selected and how an examination of the intended audience influences content. Examples from the New Mexico Tech (NMT) Library homepage show what sources are selected and what level of detail is appropriate for the intended audience. Six fundamental functions of libraries and information agencies were used to examine the content of the NMT homepage: informational, educational, research, cultural, recreational, and bibliographic/archival. The primary users of the library are students, faculty, and staff of NMT (90% of the primary users) and community users (10%). The secondary and tertiary audiences consist of potential users and remote users, respectively. Reference desk observation and user input, through questions and comments delivered to the reference and circulation desks, were the main methods of determining what to include in the homepage. The NMT homepage is divided into seven major categories: (1) Tech Library Information; (2) LIBROS (the online catalog); (3) NMT Course Specific Links; (4) Connect to Other Library Catalogs and Web Pages; (5) Resources by Subject; (6) Career Information; and (7) Information about Socorro, New Mexico and the surrounding area. Since the New Mexico Tech Library serves both an academic and a community audience, most of the examples are applicable to all types of libraries and information agencies. (Author/SWC)

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WORLD WIDE WEB HOMEPAGES: AN EXAMINATION OF CONTENT AND AUDIENCE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we will show how the content of a World Wide Web page is selected and how an examination of the intended audience influences content. Examples from the New Mexico Tech Library homepage will show what sources are selected and what level of detail is appropriate for the intended audience. Since the New Mexico Tech Library serves both an academic and a community audience, most of the examples will be applicable to all types of libraries and information agencies.

World Wide Web Homepages: An Examination of Content and Audience
The New Mexico Tech Library homepage (URL: <http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/>) was created with the combined effort of the professional, support staff, and student assistants at the library. The content of the homepage is the result of an examination of the potential audience and how to meet their information needs. This paper will categorize the information needs of the audience by using the model developed by Greer and Hale (Greer and Hale, 1982) of the six functions of libraries and information agencies: informational, educational, research, cultural, recreational, and bibliographic/archival.

The homepage for the New Mexico Tech Library originally evolved from a class project of Kathleen Le Febre and William Kincade in the Emporia State University MLS program. In this project, the World Wide Web was used to create a "community database" of local information considered useful to New Mexico Tech students. In this form, the database contained information such as local sporting event schedules, restaurant menus, and driving distances to cities throughout the state. From this beginning, the homepage evolved in three directions: one continuing and broadening the community information portion, one pointing to select information resources available from the web, and the last as an alternate means of displaying user guides. From here, the homepage has been modified into its present form.

In designing the homepage for the New Mexico Tech Library, the staff acted as a committee of the whole. The process involved an idea or effort, usually of an individual, who then submitted their work to the staff. The staff then decided whether this effort fit into the homepage and what modifications might be necessary to modify the preliminary individual effort to fit the purpose of the homepage. This process, moving from individual effort to committee agreement, is the reverse of the way many homepages are designed. The ability to reverse the usual process of homepage design is possible because of the small library staff at Tech. It has the potential advantage of speed of implementation at the possible drawback of less input from a variety of sources. A thorough user survey, a desirable first step in implementing new projects, was not possible given limitations on staff time and resources.

According to Greer and Hale, libraries and information agencies serve six fundamental functions. These are informational, educational, research, cultural, recreational, and bibliographic/archival. This model will be used in examining the content of the NMT homepage.

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The primary audience for the homepage is considered actual users of the library. This audience consists of the students, faculty, and staff of New Mexico Tech, which make up 90 percent of the total, with community borrowers making up the remaining 10 percent. A secondary audience consists of potential users of the library. These include potential students and individuals curious about the university. A third audience for the homepage consists of remote users, largely the staff of other libraries, who may be curious about other library homepages. Because of the broad audience for the homepage, it was determined all six library functions should be addressed.

Reference desk observation showed the most important functions for faculty and students of Tech are information, education, and research. It was determined through the combined observation and reference desk experience of the staff that the primary information needs of the student concerned library policies and procedures, career information, and resources by subject. Educational and research needs closely follow the curriculum of the university, which is mainly engineering and physical science, therefore most of the resources by subject pages emphasize these areas. Additional information concerning recreational and cultural activities, while not a primary focus of the homepage, were added because they would help meet an information need of prospective and new students, faculty, and staff.

The greatest source of input on what to include in the homepage is questions asked by customers at the reference and circulation desks. From these questions, the content of the homepage can be extrapolated. A second source is direct input from people who have viewed the homepage and commented on it.

The examination of this audience results in a homepage that seeks to fulfill their information needs from the outset. The page itself starts with a picture of the library rather than a stylized logo. This picture, which may seem unimportant, does show remote users what the building looks like so they can identify it should they ever come to the campus.

In its present form, the New Mexico Tech homepage (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/>) is divided into seven major categories: Tech Library Information; LIBROS (the online catalog); NMT Course Specific Links; Connect to Other Library Catalogs and Web Pages; Resources by Subject; Career Information; and Information About Socorro and the Surrounding Area. Each category seeks to fulfill one or more of the information needs of the customers.

The Tech Library Information (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/libinfo.html>) page is subdivided into nine categories. These include pages on how to use the library, a map of the library, a tour of the library, hours, services by department, meeting room reservations, new books and journals, the Tech Library staff, and our mission and goals. Somewhat self-explanatory, this page is primarily designed to meet the informational category of information needs of library customers.

A gateway to the online catalog, LIBROS, is provided by the second category. In this respect this page functions as the online catalog and as such meets the b

Bibliographic information needs of the customers.

Connect to Other Library Catalogs and Web Pages in New Mexico and Around the World (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/brochures/OTHER/otherlibs.html>) provides a quick gateway to various New Mexico library online catalogs and various library and other organization web pages. As a connection to other online catalogs, this page serves a bibliographic function. As a connection to other web pages, serves informational, cultural, or recreational functions.

N M T Course Specific Links (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/reserves/reserves.html>) will consist of course material such as course reserves, syllabi, readings and other non-copyrighted works useful in course instruction. This category is clearly targeted at meeting educational information needs.

Resources by Subject (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/subject/subject.html>) is presently divided into 47 separate categories. These pages consist of more than a list of pointers to other WWW resources, as they include lists of materials deemed by the NMT library staff as the best resources on the topic. In this respect, the pages are customized to the collection and function as a pathfinder. Most of these categories, such as Astronomy and Astrophysics, are designed to meet research or informational needs. Several categories, such as genealogy, are outside of the range of educational programs offered by the university. In this respect they help fulfill cultural and recreational needs.

Career Information (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/subject/jobs.html>) is one of the most important informational needs of the Tech student population. Feedback from the reference desk indicated employment information is second only to library use information in number of inquiries. Career Information is under the information function category in the model.

Information about Socorro and the Surrounding Area (URL:<http://www.nmt.edu:80/~nmtlib/LOCAL/local.html>) is primarily focused on meeting the cultural and recreational needs of the library's customers. This area also helps to meet informational needs, particularly of new and prospective students, faculty and staff.

The six information functions identified by Greer and Hale are therefore addressed by the various categories included in the homepage. Research needs are primarily addressed by the Resources by Subject page. Meeting Informational needs are the main purpose of the Tech Library Information and Career Information pages, although informational needs are also somewhat addressed by all the second-level pages. Educational needs are the main purpose of the NMT Course Specific Links page and are a secondary purpose of the Resources by Subject page. Cultural and Recreational needs are the main functions addressed in the Information about Socorro and surrounding area page. Bibliographic/Archival information needs are addressed by the link to the online catalog LIBROS.

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Since the Tech Library Homepage is designed to serve all functions of a library, it is quite large and detailed, particularly in the informational, educational, and research areas. While the first stage of building the homepage is virtually complete, like all homepages, it remains a work in progress.

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